ELGIN

From Vision to Action
Strategic Plan for Economic Development

prepared by
Elgin 2010
October 1994

with assistance from
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Introduction

Background

In response to a growing awareness that changes in natural resource industries were impacting rural Oregon communities, the City of Elgin, Oregon, initiated a strategic planning process in April, 1992 that was facilitated by Rural Development Initiatives, Inc.(RDI). RDI is a private, non-profit organization founded by the Oregon State Legislature and the Oregon Economic Development Department to promote rural economic development in Oregon.

In August, 1990 the Community Initiatives Program of the Oregon Economic Development Department completed an assessment of the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, (SWOT). The Community Initiatives Program later became RDI. In the SWOT analysis the current economic situation of the City of Elgin was examined and the groundwork laid for designing economic strategies for the future. Subsequently, RDI helped organize a Community Response Team (CRT) comprised of 51 volunteers representing a variety of business, government and civic interests, to be responsible for designing and implementing economic development strategies for the community.

This document is a final version of the Elgin Strategic Plan for Economic Development. It represents the combined efforts of the Elgin Community Response Team, Bruce Boggs, RDI Associate Director, Peter Dobert, consultant to RDI, and Jeff Boyer, RDI Community Development Coordinator. A list of participants and contributors is provided in the Contacts and Resources section of this document.

Strategic Planning Process

The Elgin Community Response Team, now called Elgin 2010, originally began meeting in the spring of 1992. Because the community is dependent upon seasonal industries, timber and agriculture, the CRT adjourned for the summer. Although interest in developing a strategic plan remained, the CRT did not regroup until fall, 1993. At that time, RDI began to conduct regular monthly meetings with the CRT, which added new members and reviewed both its previous work and the SWOT. Other members of the community participated in the process by offering their ideas and support at various stages.

The strategic planning process consisted of several steps designed to explore alternative development options, define goals for the future and develop a work plan to achieve these goals. The primary steps included:

- Creation of a **vision statement,** a vivid picture of the community's desired future;
- Establishment of specific **goals** to realize this vision by concentrating on the four building blocks of development: business development, physical infrastructure, quality of life and workforce development.;
- Development of **strategies** to reach these goals; and
- Design of a practical **action agenda** to implement the strategies.

Implementation

The final product of the planning process is a detailed implementation program that reflects the commitment made by the Elgin community to take action. The action agenda developed by Elgin 2010 is presented on pages 9 through 15 of this document. The group will collaborate with RDI, other state organizations, such as the Oregon Economic Development Department, and local organizations to implement many of the projects identified in the plan.

Community Profile

Overview

The community of Elgin sits tucked into the edge of the Wallowa Mountains in the northeast corner of Oregon. Located on the banks of the Grande Ronde River, Elgin is surrounded by rugged splendor. Elgin's image as a "tough logging community" has been built upon years of logging activity in the nearby Wallowa Whitman National Forest and its reliance on the wood products industry. Agriculture has also been a mainstay of the region's economy, with the surrounding ranches and farms producing cattle, grain, grass seed and some orchard activity. Decreases in timber harvests, resulting in cutbacks at local mills, and the erosion of cattle and wheat prices have impacted a "boom or bust" economic cycle for the community.

Year-round recreational opportunities abound: hunting, fishing, skiing and white water rafting. These recreational activities have begun to attract new residents, especially retirees from the states of Washington and California. Its historic Opera House, nearby Spout Springs ski area and the Grande Ronde River are just a few of the attractions that draw visitors to this rural community.

Meeting the needs of the visitor industry is one economic opportunity available to the community, improves its retail district and offers more amenities to visitors. Plans are underway to use volunteers to create a park along the Grande Ronde River to provide camping and river access to rafters. From La Grande, Elgin is the most direct route to the Wallowa Mountains and Wallowa Lake. As the tourism industry continues to grow in neighboring Wallowa County, opportunities exist to capture pass-through traffic.

Although downturns in the timber industry have impacted the economy of Elgin, Boise Cascade Timber Company continues to operate a stud mill and plywood plant in town which provide over 250 jobs. Without any organized effort, Elgin has benefited in recent years from the start-up and expansion of a number of small local entrepreneurial operations. Furniture makers, a pottery shop, a log home kit manufacturer and a saddle and harness company are just a few of the small businesses that have developed operations in Elgin. Affordable buildings and building sites, a bootstrap approach to financing and the area's small town atmosphere have made the community attractive to refugees from large urban areas seeking to establish a small business.

Despite the economic adversity of the 1980's Elgin has consistently supported its local schools. Approximately 35 % of its high school graduates go on to four-year colleges and a number of others attend community colleges. Housing and land acreages are relatively inexpensive. Most of the housing available in town is $50,000 or less. While a number of the streets are unpaved and its downtown core lacks a cohesive image, clean-up efforts are underway. A downtown "pocket park" is under construction and an historic water fountain has been moved to the site.

Striking a balance between timber and tourism, growth and resistance to change, is a challenge faced by many rural communities, and Elgin is no exception. All signs are that pass-through tourism, recreational visitors and retirement activities are going to increase. How to tap these new potentials without destroying the small town atmosphere that makes Elgin special to residents and visitors represents a significant challenge to the small community.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Summary

In August, 1990 the Community Initiatives Program of the Oregon Economic Development Department initiated an assessment of Elgin's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for considering its economic future. Through personal interviews with representatives of a variety of businesses, government and civic interests, a number of preliminary observations and recommendations were made and presented for review by the community. Highlights of the assessment are presented below:

Strengths

- Elgin demonstrates strong support for quality local education.
- Elgin serves as the gateway from the I-84 corridor to a diverse year-round recreational paradise.
- Elgin's proximity to La Grande assures some level of economic stability despite local employment conditions.
- Elgin does offer a full complement of local retail services for meeting the day-to-day convenience needs of the local population.
- Cottage industries are emerging to offer a new source of business diversity and community self reliance.
- Elgin residents and businesses have demonstrated success with bootstrap financing.
- A medical clinic is available in town.
- Both housing and land acreage are relatively inexpensive.
- Agriculture remains an important part of the Elgin/Grande Ronde Valley economic base.

Weaknesses

- Elgin remains vulnerable to the unstable economic conditions in the ranching industry and the remaining wood products mill.
- Elgin's cyclical economic history has tended to foster an "us - verses - them" attitude.
- Elgin has an extremely limited inventory of immediately buildable industrial sites.
- Elgin presents a poor, dusty and rundown image that tends to discourage new investment.
- There is resistance to growth or change expressed by significant segments of the community.
- Relatively high property tax rates tend to discourage new investment.
- Visitor services are limited in quality and quantity.
- Local comparison retail is extremely limited.
- Recent financial failures cloud future investment prospects.

Opportunities

- Boise Cascade continues to operate in the Elgin community.
- With some encouragement, small cottage industries could continue to develop.
- A river front park on the Grande Ronde would strengthen Elgin's ability to capture pass-through traffic.
- New residents drawn from retirees and pre-retirees.

Threats

- The ups and down of the Boise Cascade mill, based primarily on timber supply availability.
- Difficulty in achieving consensus on the future direction of the community.
- A large concentration of lower income housing.

Summary

The community of Elgin will need to freshen its image in order to build on its position as the gateway to the Wallowa's and capture the increasing tourism market. Through improvements to its downtown core Elgin can capitalize on its small town atmosphere and build a community that is attractive to residents and visitors alike. Many of Elgin's existing qualities - low housing prices, its commitment to schools, emerging cottage industries and outstanding recreational opportunities - have already attracted new residents and offer the potential of attracting new businesses as well. How the community responds to efforts to encourage growth will determine whether or not Elgin regains its status as a thriving rural community with a diversified economy.

Community Vision

Overview

Members of the Community Response Team and other residents of Elgin collaborated during the planning process to formulate a vision of the community for the year 2010. They considered the unique aspects of Elgin, their hopes and wishes for the community, preferences for how the town would look in twenty years, how big it would be and who would live there. The Community Response Team created a comprehensive Vision Statement which describes all aspects of life in Elgin in 2010, including job and educational opportunities, physical infrastructure and appearance and general quality of life.

A Vision of Elgin in 2010

It may be hard to find a better place to live in Oregon in the year 2010 than Elgin. Located along the banks of the Grande Ronde River at the entrance to the Wallowa Valley, Elgin will be one of the highlights in northeastern Oregon.

This friendly, livable and financially secure community, with a desired population of about 2,500 will enter the 21st century under the guidance of strong leadership, supported by active residents who pursue their community's vision through a process of consensus. Driven by pride in their community and commitment to control their own destiny, the residents and leaders will work to create a thriving economic balance that ensures jobs for today's residents and opportunities for future residents.

The people will be the driving force for the new optimism. Elgin will be well planned, attractive and developed around a common theme. Streets will be paved, truck traffic will be routed around the community, and a well designed industrial park will house existing and new small businesses. Housing opportunities will be available for all who wish to live in the community. Community services, such as police protection, health and youth programs will be a major commitment of the residents.

Resident support for educational opportunities for their children will be represented by the best educational facilities the community can afford, by high-tech education tools linked with other communities and by community volunteer service program that enrich the lives for the children from Elgin. The community center, with its year-round pool and youth programs, will be an activity center for the entire town. A drug free environment for youth will be a community-wide goal.

The economy of Elgin in 2010 will be multi-faceted, balanced and integrated. Timber and agriculture will continue to be a significant part of the economy. Additional economic stability will come from such endeavors as developing small industries, tourism, cottage industries, and attracting new technology companies dedicated to developing new opportunities related to the health of the agriculture and timber industries.

One of Elgin's economic goals will be to create a strategic plan that capitalizes on the growing recreational interest in the area. Visitors coming to Elgin will be greeted by attractive landscaping, numerous parks and an information center. The visitor will be able to spend time relaxing on the new golf course, using the new boat launching facility on the river, traveling on the scenic railroad into the Wallowa Valley, using the hiking/biking trails and ski area. Tours will promote the cultural heritage of the valley. New overnight facilities will persuade visitors to spend extra time in the area.

Elgin in 2010 will symbolize a rural community that established a vision for itself twenty years prior and committed its resources to achieve that vision. The driving force behind its efforts was to ensure a sound future for itself and its residents in the 21st century. This statement reflects the success of that mission.

Action Agenda

Overview

The action agenda is made up of goals, strategies and actions. Goals were developed for each of the four economic development building blocks: business development, physical infrastructure, quality of life and workforce development. To reach these goals, Elgin 2010 developed a number of strategies. For example, the development of a central park and pocket parks will help achieve the goals of improving the livability of Elgin and will demonstrate the town's willingness to invest in itself, hopefully stimulating continuing private investment in its commercial area. Other strategies address the goals for improvements in business development, physical infrastructure and workforce development.

The highest priority strategies include an action plan with timelines for completion, responsible parties, collaborators, projected budgets and success indicators. All strategies are presented in this action agenda.

Business Development Goal

By the year 2000 create a net gain of 100 new family wage jobs through expansion, recruitment and development of businesses.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 1

Initiate design and merchandising improvements to Elgin's business district to better meet the needs of local residents and to capture an increasing share of the expanding tourism trade in the region.

Action A

Initiate a beautification project (cleaning).

Task 1:
Define project area, assign responsibility, determine scope of work.

Timeline: Annually, by June 1.
Responsible Parties: E2010, Christine McLaughlin.
Collaborators: Downtown businesses.
Budget: -0-
Success Indicators: Project defined.

Task 2:
Recruit and coordinate volunteers to work on selected projects.

Timeline: Annually, by April 1.
Responsible Parties: Christine McLaughlin.
Collaborators: Marsha Bates.
Budget: -0-
Success Indicators: 10 volunteers recruited.

Task 3:
Educate businesses about

expectations and provide recognition.

Timeline: To be determined.
Responsible Parties: Peggy Delaney, Joe Garlitz.
Collaborators: Christine McLaughlin, Maureen Smolkowski, Mary Rose Nichols.
Budget: -0-

Task 4:
Drawing of downtown

Timeline: February, 1995.
Responsible Parties: Christine McLaughlin.
Collaborators: Jon Hanly.
Budget: $100

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2

Promote and encourage the growth and development of existing businesses in Elgin.

Action A

Identify existing businesses with growth potential.

Action B

Determine obstacles to growth (for example, need for facilities, capital, marketing assistance or worker or proprietor training).

Action C
Help businesses obtain resources needed to overcome obstacles to growth and development.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 3
Initiate a business recruitment program

Action A
Draw on work of the Regional Strategies Board and others to determine industries for which Elgin has advantages. Responsible party - Kevin Cooper

Action B
Work with the Oregon Economic Development Department and the Union County Economic Development Corporation to identify and recruit prospective businesses in targeted industries.

Action C
Develop an industrial park and/or facility suitable for businesses in targeted industries.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 4
Develop recreational and interpretive facilities at Hunaha Park on the Grande Ronde River in Elgin.

Action A
Determine the feasibility of a city park on the Grande Ronde, including an RV park, raft launching facility and interpretive trails and facilities promoting watershed restoration and health.

Action B
Design and develop park facilities as feasible.

Quality of Life Goal

Improve the livability of Elgin and ensure that all residents have affordable quality housing and access to effective social service programs.

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY 1.

Complete the development of a central park and pocket parks.

Action A

Develop a design for the central park.

Timeline: 7-6-94.
Responsible Parties: Joe Garlitz.
Collaborators: E2010.
Budget: -0-
Success Indicators: Design details on paper, 7-6-94.

Action B

Sell 100 memorial bricks to finance purchase of adjacent land and construction of the park.

Timeline: Labor Day.
Responsible Parties: Kevin Cooper, LaVeta Botz.
Collaborators: Vanetta McVey, Ralph and Annette Howell, Ed Schumacher.
Budget: -0-
Success Indicators: Sold 100 bricks by Labor Day, 1994.

Action C

Recruit volunteers to clean up and landscape the park.

Timeline: June 1, 1995.
Responsible Parties: LaVeta Botz.
Collaborators: Ed Botz, Ray McVey.
Budget: -0-
Success Indicators: 10 volunteers from general community.

Action D

Do the landscaping.

Timeline: June 1, 1995.
Responsible Parties: LaVeta Botz, Ray McVey, Ed Botz
Collaborators: Christine McLaughlin, Vanetta McVey, Olga Grant.
Budget: $500 to $1,000.
Success Indicators: Completed park by Labor Day.

Action E
Refurbish fountain.

Timeline:	November 1, 1994.
Responsible Parties:	Ed Botz, Ed Schmittle.
Collaborators:	Pete Boice.
Budget:	$250.
Success Indicators:	Water flows, water drains, rock replaced, sand blasted and green paint removed.

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY 2

Initiate a campaign to broaden and strengthen leadership and citizen involvement in community issues.

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY 3

Develop and initiative a five to ten year housing plan to meet Elgin's needs for low-income, moderately-priced single family, and upscale housing.

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY 4

Design and implement a social service network to provide assistance to residents of Elgin.

QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGY 5

Support and encourage the weekly newspaper as a means to keep citizens informed of community issues and activities.

Workforce Development Goal

By the year 2000 have a support system in place to encourage and enable Elgin residents to access information, education and training required for existing and new employment and business opportunities.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 1

Collaborate with the Division of Continuing Education at Eastern Oregon State College and Blue Mountain Community College to design and establish training programs to prepare the existing workforce for new employment and business opportunities.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2

Work with the school district and EOSC to expand Elgin's use of EDNET to deliver information and educational programs to students and adults.

Physical Infrastructure Goal

Enhance and develop the community's transportation and telecommunications infrastructure to meet the present and future needs of residents and businesses.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 1

Develop a bypass for trucks traveling from Highway 204 to Highway 82.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 2

Establish a special improvement district to finance chip sealing and maintenance of all city streets.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 3

Assist in establishing and participate in a regional task force to promote improvement of strategic highways in northeastern Oregon.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 4

Assess adequacy of Elgin's telecommunications infrastructure and initiate strategy to upgrade to competitive standards.